The Bishop of New York
The Rt. Rev. Paul Moore Jr.
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STATEMENT

On Monday, December 15, 1975, I ordained Ellen Marie Barrett a Deacon, and on Monday, January 10, 1977, I ordained her a Priest. I acted in full knowledge of her professed homosexual orientation, believing (as I still do) that she was fully qualified in every way for holy orders.

Ellen first applied to me informally in 1972. At that time she was fairly active in the Gay Movement and had written an article or two on the subject. I told her then that I would not recommend her to the Standing Committee. She later applied to the Diocese of Pennsylvania, but was not accepted there. She was serious about her vocation, however, and matriculated at The General Theological Seminary. Early in 1975 she reapplied for candidacy in the Diocese of New York. She had by then resigned her office in "Integrity" and ceased to be active in the Gay Movement. More important, I was convinced that her vocation to ordination had deepened; she professed this vocation to ministry, service and teaching as her consuming interest. Her recommendation from The General Theological Seminary was excellent in terms of character, personality, behavior and academic competence.

Ellen went through the rigorous screening process of the Diocese of New York, which includes a weekend conference with the Ministries Commission. She also passed the canonically required psychiatric examination which is designed to screen out those emotionally unfit for the ministry. (It is worth noting in this context that the American Psychiatric Association, the professional organization of psychiatrists, has declared that homosexuality as such is not an illness.)

I presented her to the Standing Committee, and she was admitted as a Candidate on May 8, 1975. She was approved for the Diaconate on November 6th of that year. The news of Ellen's impending ordination to the Diaconate was picked up by an unfriendly source, and news releases were sent throughout the country. As a result we had several letters objecting to her ordination. I called a special meeting of the Standing Committee which unanimously reaffirmed its approval of her ordination to the Diaconate.

The fact that she had publicly admitted her homosexual orientation was not judged by the Bishop or the Standing Committee to be a barrier to Ordination. All of us were aware that many homosexual persons have been ordained into the ministry of the Church over the years and have served the Church well. They were, of course, forced to be very secretive about this aspect of their personality. Now it is possible to be more open about one's sexual orientation, and that is a healthy development.

The personal morality, lifestyle, and behavior of every ordinand must be and is carefully weighed by the Bishop, the Ministries Commission, and the Standing Committee. This applies to persons of all sexual orientations. In the absence of public scandal, however, the personal morality of an ordinand becomes almost by definition a matter between him or her and a confessor, pastor or bishop. Suffice it to say that Ellen Barrett's life and profession had not been an occasion of public scandal.

In approving persons for ordination, the Bishop, Standing Committee, and Ministries Commission deal with each person as a whole and as an individual. It is an intensely personal judgment and does not lend itself to categories. Ellen Barrett, judged as a whole person, was determined by us to possess a valid vocation to the diaconate and priesthood, and to have the character and competence to fulfill this vocation. Her ordination was not a political act and did not seek to make a statement about homosexual activity; it was, like any ordination, the solemn laying on of hands upon a person carefully and prayerfully chosen.

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A great many people who opposed this ordination shared with me some of their theological views; I should respond in kind. In briefest form, I believe that better guidance will be found in the fullness of the Gospel than in the narrowness of isolated verses selected painstakingly from the Epistles or the Old Testament. There is a timelessness to the message of God's love that outweighs the datedness of so many Biblical injunctions rooted in ancient societies.

Prejudices passed down through the centuries have made it difficult for most of us to make a genuinely Christian judgment of the homosexual condition. We know, however, that a great deepening and broadening of our understanding of human sexuality has emerged in recent years, nurtured by the interaction between traditional Christian theology and our modern world's perception of human nature. There has, for one thing, been decided movement in the Church away from a tradition which grudgingly accepted sex for procreative ends only toward a more encompassing, psychosomatic view of sexuality as a good and desirable way of expressing a loving relationship between persons. One telling result of this theological shift is the general acceptance within the Anglican communion of birth control as a fully moral practice.

In shifting away from an exclusively procreative view of sex to one of sex as a human expression of love, we move beyond explicit Biblical guidance. I pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us. The Church has reawakened to the realization that Truth is an open-ended process of pro-

gressive revelation, and what we are witnessing in our time with regard to human sexuality is just such a process.

For most people, however, this rethinking of the morality of sexual expression is yet to be extended to homosexual persons. I believe that their recognition as full members of the Church with the opportunities, rights, and responsibilities of all other members is based ultimately on Jesus' view of human nature as reflected in the Gospel. Again and again, He broke through the prejudices of the day to accept and lift up those rejected and downgraded by others. And just as the reasons for their rejection were often beyond their control, so the homosexual person's condition is generally not a matter of conscious choice.

The forces that shape sexual orientation are still somewhat mysterious, but there is general agreement that our sexuality is forged at an incredibly early age, long before puberty. Thus, a person's sexual preference is not in the category of sin, and the sometimes violent social prejudice against the homosexual condition comes painfully close to the recorded targets of Jesus' preaching.

As a Church, we are only beginning to work out the complicated issues in the area of human sexuality. I plan to have some conferences in the near future to help us all in our thinking. Meanwhile, for those of you who have an interest in exploring the issue of the moment, I have listed some books that might prove helpful.

The Same Sex. Ralph Weltge, ed. Pilgrim Press, 1969.

Time for Consent. N. Pittenger. SCM Press, 1967.

The Church and the Homosexual. John J. McNeill, S.J. Sheed, Andrews and McNeill, 1976.

THE STANDING COMMITTEE
of
THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK
1047 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, N. Y. 10025

February 14, 1977

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: THE ORDINATION OF THE REV. ELLEN MARIE BARRETT

A good deal of correspondence and publicity has been addressed to the ordination of Ellen Marie Barrett. We are writing to state our conception of the decisions made by this Committee in the past in connection with that ordination. Our purpose is neither to justify nor to apologize, but rather to explain the actions taken in hopes that support or criticism of the Standing Committee and Bishops involved with the ordination will be addressed to the issues they considered, and not to other issues. These issues may be faced, and may have been faced, by other Standing Committees, which may benefit by a statement of our experience.

Members of the Standing Committee of our diocese are elected by the diocesan convention, in which parishes are represented proportionate to their membership. The decisions in question were made over a period of several years. Only three members of the current committee were members when the first decision was presented for a vote. Twelve elected members of the Committee have been involved in one or more of the four decisions made. All votes on the subjects discussed herein were unanimous except the most recent, in which one dissenting vote was cast. Of the current Committee, two members are opposed in principle to the action taken.

There are many other people involved in every ordination in the Diocese. A proposing rector and vestry, the Ministries Commission, a screening conference composed of clergy and laity, a seminary faculty, a psychiatrist and a Bishop must approve a candidate before ordination can take place. Thus, many devoted churchmen have been involved in this case with decisions similar to ours; no one church authority bears sole responsibility. Nevertheless, a major portion of the responsibility belongs to the Standing Committee.

The issue faced by the Committee on four separate occasions can be simply stated as follows:

> *Should a person who is in all respects otherwise qualified be denied ordination to the priesthood of our church because that person openly acknowledges homosexual orientation?*

The Committee answered this question in the negative on four occasions, three times by unanimous vote.

Some will find it difficult to conceive that a person openly acknowledging homosexual orientation can be otherwise in all respects qualified for ordination to the priesthood. Others will conclude, perhaps on the basis of extraordinary national publicity, that Ellen Marie Barrett is not in fact otherwise qualified. On the basis of information available at the time votes were taken, the Committee and all other groups in the process decided that she was qualified, and thus the Committee faced squarely the narrowed issue stated above.

No decision on the part of the Committee and our Bishops to approve the ordination of any person has ever been a political act in support of any liberation movement. Beyond this, the issue as framed by the Committee does not allow for an interpretation that the Committee approved the ordination out of concern for an oppressed minority group. No ordination decision can be generalized without regard to the vocation of the individual ordained. Thus, it was not the purpose of any member who voted in favor of the candidacy and ordination either to approve or disapprove, or to encourage or discourage, any form of sexual conduct for members of our church generally.

The Committee has never taken the position that all forms of sexual behavior are irrelevant in considering the qualifications of a candidate. In the case of Miss Barrett, the Committee did not decide that licentious, promiscuous or notorious sexual behavior are acceptable in a person seeking ordination. A majority of the Committee believes that Miss Barrett is not such a person.

In the case of Miss Barrett, the Committee did not decide that one who advocates homosexual behavior by others, or influences children to become homosexuals, should be ordained. A majority of the Committee believes that Miss Barrett is not such a person.

The Committee was not presented with these questions, regardless of recent publicity in the national press causing others to frame the issue in such terms. Allegations in current press coverage that were presented to the Committee at the time were explained by Miss Barrett to the satisfaction of the Committee at the time. If the Committee had believed all current allegations, further inquiry might have been required.

Some who are critical believe that all of these questions are inherent in the word "homosexual", whether or not facts confirming perverse sexual behavior are alleged. The members of the Committees who voted to approve her candidacy and ordination were not encumbered by such inherent images. The Committee was no more aware of any specific sexual practices of this candidate than of those of many other candidates, heterosexual or covert homosexual.

At the same time, the Committee did not require a commitment to abstinence as a condition to ordination. Some correspondence and discussion has drawn a distinction between "orientation" and "practice". The Committee did not draw such a distinction.

Much of the responsible criticism comes from theologians and people with

training in psychology, with whom other theologians and psychologists disagree. Apparently, many people have clearer views on this subject than any member of this Committee or any Bishop involved in the actual decisions has ever had. For some, the Bible produces this clarity of view, and for others a natural law, or psychological axiom grants undeniable guidance. Many believe that ordination should have been denied simply because of projected controversy.

Suffice it to say that none of these principles was determinative to the Committees that made the decisions. The dialogue continues, within the Committee and without. If the issue stated above is as pervasive as some think it is, the Committee position may change as a result of subsequent elections. In this uncertain and developing context, we can only look for guidance to the Holy Spirit, trusting that any mistakes made by any of us will be corrected.

In the meantime, the Committee will continue to approve only individuals determined to be highly qualified by the diocesan selection process, considering, as always, vocation to the priesthood and commitment to the Body of Christ to be the dominant prerequisites.

Respectfully submitted,

THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF
THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK

By: Marshall M. Green
Secretary

Arthur W. Hargate, President
Carol L. Anderson
John L. Kater, Jr.
Sister Andrea, O.S.H.
George Browne
Marshall M. Greene

Because I was not present at any of the discussion of this issue prior to the ordination of Ellen Barrett, I do not feel competent to sign any statement of opinion in this matter.

Madeleine L'Engle Franklin

Although I believe the foregoing statement represents accurately the process that has taken place, and the conclusion reached, I do not share the view the Committee has taken of the question posed or agree with the decisions made.

Christopher L. Webber.